

An Exploration of Friday Night Cohort 20 Reading Habits:
A Case Study on Digital and Traditional Reading Habits

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Chapter I -Introduction

Considering the onset of the digital age and shifting trends in higher-education, it is necessary for graduate professors and students to continually be aware of societal changes that may alter the learning environment. More and more frequently, students are utilizing digital resources to complement classroom instruction and traditional assignments.

Statement of the Problem

These societal changes paired with the researchers assumptions and preferences have led this research team to conduct a brief study of Wilmington University, Cohort 20, Friday night doctoral students. The reading preferences and habits of Cohort 20, Friday night doctoral students are unknown. Also, it is unknown how Cohort 20, Friday night doctoral students interact with digital technology (wikispace) to complement the classroom instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to reveal the reading preferences and habits of Wilmington University's Cohort 20, Friday night doctoral students. We would like to uncover the frequency to which members of the cohort interact with a digital technology and to identify trends among the respondents. This data will allow the Ed.D. faculty and students of Wilmington University to uncover and respond to findings in their instructional and academic decision-making. Through this brief case-study, we hope to uncover the reading preferences of

Wilmington Cohort 20, Friday night doctoral students in order to provide professors with insight for designing and engaging students in reading assignments.

The aforementioned will be accomplished through a multi-faceted process. Students will be given the task of reading a brief case study, which they may choose to read digitally (via a wikispace) or by downloading the file and reading a print copy. Following this, students will complete a brief demographic and reading preference survey. The researchers will analyze the survey results and web-analytic data to identify the reading preferences and patterns of the participants.

Need for the Study

Graduate students and professors alike must be aware of the impact digital/electronic reading assignments may have on the learning environment. In addition to this, generational differences, reading preferences, and reading habits, despite digital or traditional in nature, are important to identify early in a course. It is important for students and professors to understand the impact monitored reading may or may not have upon reading completion.

Defining Necessary Terms

To avoid misconceptions, it is essential to provide conceptual and operational definitions of web analytics, wikispace, and e-reading. Conceptually, as defined by the Digital Analytics Association, “Web analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of internet data for purposes of understanding and optimizing web usage.” In operational terms, for the purposes of this case study, web analytics will refer to various variables. The researchers will be able to track the date and time each user completes the requested survey. In addition to this,

through the wikispace website, the research team will be able to track statistics for each page, including number of visits by users per day and the number of unique visits (from a new IP address) by users each day. Finally, through the use of a third analytical tool, ClustrMaps, the researchers will be able to view total visits to each page, the locations from which each participant has viewed each page, and the date, time, and location of the most recent visits to the website.

Conceptually, as defined by the creators of wikispaces, a wiki is “a collaborative website that allows for quick and easy creation of pages containing organized information directed at a particular group of users.” Operationally, the wikispace is the website that the research team has directed the study participants to interact with. This website was utilized due to its user-friendly formatting and the ability to incorporate web-analytics and HTML coding.

The final definition necessary is e-reading. Conceptually, e-reading, as defined by PC Magazine, is “reading books and newspapers on a portable device such as an e-book reader, tablet computer, or smartphone.” For purposes of this case study, e-reading’s operational definition will be considered reading the suggested article online, via the wikispace. Participants are given the option of e-reading the article or downloading and printing a hard, traditional, copy of the text.

Research Questions

In order to guide a focused case study of the reading habits and preferences of Wilmington University Cohort 20, Friday night doctoral students, it is necessary to identify guiding questions. This will ensure alignment of purpose and result in relevant findings.

- Do Wilmington University Cohort 20, Friday night doctoral students prefer reading online or via more traditional means?
- Do demographics or generational differences correlate with reading preferences?
- Do the survey results align with the analytics? If there are discrepancies, what does this tell us?

Boundaries

As with any study, this case study includes various boundaries. Due to the nature of Wilmington University's doctoral program and the case study format, we are merely analyzing a population of 24 students, including the 6 researchers as well. The small size of this population creates difficulty in determining reliability of the study. It is difficult to generalize findings with a sample this small in size.

The team requested that their colleagues complete the anonymous survey, however there are no mandates or levels of accountability, resulting in the potential for less than 100% participation.

Finally, as with all survey responses, we must rely on participant self-perception in each response. Responses may not reflect true objectivity and/or accuracy, further limiting the final results.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Required reading at the collegiate level has been reported to be much lower than what college instructors would like it to be. The gathering of this data through surveys and other means of collection has indicated a disturbing trend in students completing their required reading. In addition, the amount of required reading that students complete at the graduate level does not appear to be that much better (Arquette, 2010).

The researchers sought to explore this trend in the research given new and emerging digital trends in reading. The Wilmington University Digital Library System was used to search the following databases: Business Source Complete, ERIC, CINAHL and SocINDEX. The following terms were used to search for research that indicated the completion of required reading at the college level; generational trends and reading preferences, digital reading versus traditional reading preferences, the reading habits of doctoral students, and reading preferences.

The emergence of the digital forms of reading did not generate a great deal of research as this is a new trend. Little research was found on the generational reading trends and preferences. The lack of empirical studies on this topic was encouraging as it supported the topic that the researchers sought to explore; the reading trends of doctoral students in a cohort grouping.

The researchers first explored generational differences and work ethic. Specifically looking at what the literature states about Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. A study by Meriac, Woehr, and Banister suggests that a higher work ethic exists among Baby Boomers than the other generations included (2010).

An exploration as to the use of digital media among younger readers was also researched. A recent paper on the use of electronic media and reading habits suggests that younger readers are developing screen reading behaviors (Jadhav, 2010).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Selected Research Approach

The Case Study methodology “seeks to understand the unit as a whole” (de Vaus, 2001). It allows the researchers to intensively analyze a group of individuals to test a hypothesis or be descriptive or explanatory in nature. Case studies, due to their nature, do not provide the potential for generalizability, but allow for an in-depth analysis of a case (deVaus, 2001).

Data Sources and Sampling Strategy

The source of data used was a convenience sample of Wilmington University Doctoral students from the Cohort 20 Friday night class. This was a group of 24 students, focusing on Organizational, Educational, or Higher Educational Leadership, and may have included the instructor and six members of the research team. Data was compiled through the use of a brief survey, web analytics generated by the Wikispaces host website, and Clustrmaps.

Measurement and Operationalization of the Variables of Research Interest

Descriptive statistics will be available for generational data, gender, track, residence, and standardized responses to three statements pertaining to reading preferences and habits. In addition, frequency data related to the web analytics has been compiled. A copy of the survey administered may be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers designed a web page using Wikispaces. A brief case study article was embedded on the Wikispace that students could read online or download as a hard copy. In

addition, a survey was embedded on the Wikispace. The doctoral group was prompted, via email, to read the instructions on the Wikispace. Survey results and analytics were compiled through user interaction on the Wikispace.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Once the data have been collected, the researchers review descriptive statistics and frequency data on both the survey results and web analytics. Graphic depictions will be created of the survey items as well. This will allow the team to uncover significant trends among the data.

Following this, the team will run correlation data to determine interactions among the variables and likelihood of reading completion. Again, trends and significance will be uncovered.

Validity Concerns

Wikispaces are open web based platforms. Anyone could have accessed the site, skewing the analytics and possibly the survey results. Trends in surveys issued to this cohort have indicated that not everyone will have read the article or taken the survey.

Ethical issues

As with most web-based analytics, subjects are unaware that their web browsing is being tracked, compiled into data, and analyzed. It is an interesting dilemma, given the ethical issues that are addressed by the human subjects review board. Furthermore, if subjects know that they are being tracked, the same results may not be generated.

Overall, the case study analysis of the Friday night Wilmington University, Cohort 20 doctoral students will allow the researchers to conduct an in depth analysis of reading preferences, habits, and interactions with digital media. The research team aims to utilize their findings in order to provide the cohort members and doctoral faculty with insight into the reading trends within the cohort. This will allow for informed instructional decision-making.

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Appendix A:

Wilmu Case Study Survey

4/20/12 9:25 AM

Wilmu Case Study Survey

Please complete the following. Thanks!

* Required

Age *

Please select one of the following

- ☐ Traditionalist (born 1922-1945)
- ☐ Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964)
- ☐ Generation X (born 1965-1978)
- ☐ Generation Y (born 1979-1994)
- ☐ Generation Z/"Always On" (born 1994+)

Gender *

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

Track *

Please select your concentration

- ☐ Educational Leadership
- ☐ Higher Educational Leadership
- ☐ Organizational Leadership

Residence *

- ☐ New Jersey
- ☐ Delaware
- ☐ Pennsylvania
- ☐ Maryland
- ☐ Other

"I complete all of the reading assigned in the doctoral program." *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

"When reading my doctoral articles/texts, I generally..." *

- ☐ Prefer to read "printed" materials (traditional books, hard-copies of articles, etc.)
- ☐ Balance web-based and print-based reading
- ☐ Prefer to read web-based materials (e-books, web-files, electronic articles, etc.)

For this specific activity, I... *

- ☐ Chose to download and print the file before reading
- ☐ Chose to read the article on the wikispace
- ☐ Chose not to read the article at all

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